Dry Channel Bridge
Spanning the Dry Channel of the Clark Fork
Thompson Falls
Sanders County
Montana

HAER No. MT-29

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Engineering Record
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20240

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HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

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Location: Spanning the Dry Channel (now a reservoir) of the Clark Fork just above the Dry Channel Dam on the south edge of Thompson Falls, Sanders County, Montana.

Date of Construction: 1911

Present Owner: Sanders County
Sanders County Courthouse
Thompson Falls, Montana 59873

Present Use: Vehicular Bridge

Significance: In July of 1910, the Commissioners of Sanders County retained William Pierce Cowles, a Minneapolis engineer, to design bridges over the Clark Fork at Plains, Thompson Falls, and Trout Creek. The Missoula bridge builder, O.E. Peppard, won the contract to build those bridges for a total of $125,650. Actually, the construction at Thompson Falls involved two bridges: one over the main channel and one over the dry channel. The Dry Channel bridge was evidently built with the Thompson Falls Power Plant in mind, because, although built about one hundred yards upstream of the dry channel dam, the bridge is above the level of the reservoir. The Thompson Falls bridges were built in 1911. Construction of the power plant began in 1913. The Dry Channel bridge is 377 feet long. The three main spans, supported by concrete piers, are each 90-foot, pin-connected Pratt through trusses. Their superstructures are as follows: lower chords are eyebars; hip verticals are eyebars and the other verticals are two laced channel sections; diagonals are eyebars with turnbuckles; upper chord is a continuous steel plate riveted atop two channels with lacing bars riveted to their lower flanges. Steel I-beam floor beams are connected to the superstructure by means of U-bolts at the hip verticals and are riveted to the superstructure at the other verticals. A deck of bridge plank is supported by wood stringers which sit on the top flange of the floor beams. The main spans are approached at either end by wood stringer spans. Although

the Main Channel Bridge is closed to traffic, the Dry Channel Bridge is still open, providing access to the island which separates the two bridges and which serves as a park. The Thompson Falls Power Plant, which merged with the Montana Power Company in 1929, still generates electricity with the six Allis Chalmers generator units that came on line between 1915 and 1917.

Transmitted by: Kevin Murphy, Historian HAER, 1984; from data compiled by Fredric L. Quivik, 1979